

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

In the Matter of:ACCIDENT OF THE LADY D
ON MARCH 6, 2004
in Baltimore, Maryland

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Docket No. DCA 04 MM015

Tuesday,
March 9, 2004

INTERVIEW OF:

GEORGE BENTRAM
ELIZABETH BENTRAM

PRESENT:

MORGAN J. TURRELL, NTSB
MARIETTE BURER
ANDREW MURRAY
MARK HAMMOND

P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. TURRELL: Good

evening. This is Morgan Turrell, National
Transportation Safety Board. It is 6:30 on March 9.
We are at the Marriott Inner Harbor Hotel. We are
conducting an interview with some passengers from the
water taxi accident on March 6.

And to my left are investigators?

MS. BURER: Mariette Burer, NTSB.

MR. MURRAY: Andy Murray, Director of National
Historic Seaport.

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER HAMMOND: Lieutenant
Commander Mark Hammond, Coast Guard Sector, Baltimore.

MR. TURRELL: And you would just introduce
yourself?

DR. BENTRAM: George A. Bentram, II, M.D.,
B-E-N-T-R-A-M.

MRS. BENTRAM: Elizabeth Bentram,
B-E-N-T-R-A-M.

MR. TURRELL: Okay. George, if you would just
tell us where currently reside, not the exact address,
but the city and the state?

DR. BENTRAM: Harrisonburg, Virginia.

MR. TURRELL: And George, would you perhaps

1 tell us about your background, and your education, your
2 current employment?

3 DR. BENTRAM: I am currently a family
4 physician. Self employed at Bentram Family Practice.
5 I did my high school in Osman High School in Manassass,
6 Virginia. Went to the University of Virginia on a
7 graduate in Biology and also for a M.D. degree. Did my
8 residency in Lancaster, Pennsylvania for three years,
9 at Lancaster General Hospital.

10 MR. TURRELL: Okay. And perhaps you can tell
11 us why you are in Baltimore this last weekend?

12 DR. BENTRAM: Yes, we were up for a vacation
13 visit to the Aquarium, we wanted to visit Fort McHenry
14 as well.

15 MR. TURRELL: Okay. And Doctor, if you would
16 just go ahead and tell us in your own words, what
17 happened that day, starting from the morning or noon
18 and take us through the accident and with as much
19 detail as you can supply.

20 DR. BENTRAM: The morning started out early.
21 We all left there early and got breakfast, which was
22 good and unusual -- But, we had breakfast probably by
23 7:30ish at the hotel. It was a very rainy morning.
24 Then it slacked up enough that we could walk with
25 umbrellas over to the Aquarium. The tickets were for

1 10:45. And we wanted to see if we could get in early,
2 we didn't think it would be very crowded and it wasn't
3 that day. So, we went over there and we walked around
4 a bit, to, to, it wasn't open until, and we walked
5 around and a lot of the Inner Harbor shops weren't
6 open. We walked over across to the Renaissance Hotel
7 and there are shops and we walked up and down the
8 stairs, and then came back finally to the Aquarium and
9 it was open and people were going in. They let us in,
10 even though we had tickets for later in the day. We
11 did the Aquarium. We got out of there and we got a
12 snack and saw the Dolphin show at 11, and then started
13 up to the Inner Harbor. And we were walking around and
14 I think we went back to the hotel at that point. Went
15 swimming in the hotel. It was at the other Marriott,
16 Waterfront and swam. And I took the kids swimming, Liz
17 rested.

18 And, you know, we came back and decided,
19 well, we had a little bit time before the last water
20 taxi went over to Fort McHenry. We tried to get that
21 in. So, we got down there and we were waiting and
22 finally somebody did come. And they took us to the
23 Inner Harbor, and we got off and got on another boat
24 there. And then we proceeded to Fells Point, at which
25 point we made a transfer over. My daughter left her

1 coat on the, that vessel and so -- At some point, we
2 left the coat and then we went over to Fort McHenry.
3 It was sunshiny by then and windy. And we did the
4 movie first. Purchased some tickets in line, and then
5 we toured the Fort. And then there was a time factor,
6 we had to be back by four, the last taxi was leaving.

7 We made it before four and got on the taxi.
8 And I remember looking up in the sky and seeing a
9 demarcation between sunlight and dark clouds. And I
10 commented to Liz, you know, we really didn't want to be
11 on that boat. And then it was still clear where we
12 were, and I thought the squall was moving parallel to
13 where we were and not to us. And we not being from
14 Baltimore, I didn't know where west was, because we
15 heard the storms come out of the west.

16 We got on the boat, and it started raining
17 heavily, and the winds picked up and it was kind of
18 rocking and the comment was made by the first mate that
19 we might have to get out of the life preservers or
20 something like that. And after he made that statement,
21 the, well, let me back up. The captain made a very
22 clean maneuver, about a 360 degree, I was watching him
23 and seeing what was he going to do. Because he had
24 finished his 360 degree turn and he put us broadside
25 twice and he was going around into a second turn and

1 just as he completed that second turn moving to, just
2 as he completed the first turn that we got hit
3 broadside with a big gust of wind and the boat went
4 over suddenly. As it was going over, I reached back
5 and opened up a window, and then, I was thrown over
6 against the other side of the boat. I hit my head on
7 the right side. And gathered myself and took a survey
8 of the situation and looked up and I saw a bright
9 light, and I saw what seemed like clear water and very
10 shallow water, and subsequently cross breaking. And
11 then I felt myself being pulled out. At that point I
12 looked back down -- and grabbed her with my left hand
13 on her shoulder. And I was out the boat that time and
14 I didn't have to swim or struggle or search on a way
15 out, because it was provided for me.

16 And then I came to the top of the water and
17 gathered myself to go back under. And I kicked off my
18 shoes and as I went back under, a body was underneath
19 me, so I moved to the side and the waves were pretty
20 bad then, the wind was pretty high and I felt myself
21 starting to drown, even though I am a good swimmer. At
22 that point, I was crying out, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus,
23 repeatedly and somebody on top grabbed me and helped
24 pull me over the, tube on the side of the boat and I
25 made up and had no strength, had no courage. Couldn't

1 do anything. I was just crying out --

2 And then I saw -- And I put them together, so
3 we could huddle and I was looking for my wife. At some
4 point the boat appeared. It was pretty high wind, so
5 it was driving us down further at the harbor and the
6 boat was kind of like a -- boat. And had to, it looked
7 like a landing craft from World War II, gray boat. And
8 it reached its, and we all kind of lifted up the boat,
9 well, we transferred over. And then it kind of lifted
10 up the boat and there at that point, I saw Sarah
11 floating face down in the water and I -- they pulled
12 her out, a man reached down and kind of dangling by the
13 legs, and reached for her, transferred from another
14 person in the water. And helped hold him and stabilize
15 him, while he got her, he got her back up and they
16 started applying CPR. And then she was very pale, very
17 lifeless. And there --

18 But, they immediately got, another boat came
19 and they transferred over and I told Liz, I was going
20 to with Sarah. And it seemed like an instant we were
21 on the dock and running, a man had her in his arms,
22 some type of officer, I am not sure who. And I was
23 running, trying to keep up because I didn't have my
24 shoes on and it seemed like everything was bumping on
25 my feet. And finally we got to an ambulance and they

1 got in -- and told me to go in front because I was
2 shaking pretty badly at that point. And I was up in
3 front and they had the heater going full blast -- And I
4 just kind of stayed there with -- I just kind of stayed
5 with -- pretty well for a period of time.

6 And then they wanted to do a procedure on her
7 for wanting the blood -- bypass, heart/lung bypass.
8 And there was -- And I changed into some scrubs and I
9 did that, and they gave me a sweatshirt, I put that on,
10 still don't have glasses at that point. And --

11 How far do you want me to go?

12 MR. TURRELL: I think that part of it, we will
13 stop. I will ask a few questions.

14 Can you recall from the time when you were at
15 the Fort and the time how long it takes before the boat
16 capsized, can you estimate how many minutes?

17 DR. BENTRAM: A few hundred yards, maybe five
18 at the most.

19 MR. TURRELL: A few hundred yards, and five
20 minutes.

21 (Pause.)

22 MR. TURRELL: When you came up to the surface,
23 and you were obviously looking for the boat, did you
24 see anything around you, any, any landmark or any --

25 DR. BENTRAM: Well, as it was flipping over,

1 there was a sheltered area, dock area that I wondering
2 if he was going to try to go for shelter area.

3 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

4 DR. BENTRAM: From where the wind was coming
5 out.

6 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

7 DR. BENTRAM: Back into the, to my left. I
8 thought that would be a good option for him to kind of
9 seek shelter from that wind.

10 MR. TURRELL: Can you estimate how far --

11 DR. BENTRAM: A hundred yards.

12 MR. TURRELL: Okay. Did you at any time hear
13 the engines change or could you tell if the captain may
14 have been doing with the boat, just before it capsized?

15 DR. BENTRAM: I was confused and dazed and I
16 was, there are not a lot of options out there. And I
17 think he was going in a holding pattern, which
18 unfortunately, you know, would bring us broadside
19 twice, the top of that boat was like a sail. And I
20 remember going over, we both remember this, a little
21 shift in the passengers because the front left side of
22 the boat dipped down under the water and the water was
23 coming --

24 MRS. BENTRAM: On the way --

25 DR. BENTRAM: On the way from Fells Point to

1 Fort McHenry. So, at one point, he asked several
2 passengers to go back in the back and sit to equalize
3 the weight and put weight and it worked.

4 MRS. BENTRAM: On the way to Fort McHenry from
5 Fells Point, I remember thinking it just doesn't seem
6 very safe because there was water pouring out from a
7 little hole.

8 DR. BENTRAM: In the center of --

9 MRS. BENTRAM: After the men moved.

10 DR. BENTRAM: After the men moved. After we
11 did the weight shift. Yeah, that is right. Sure.

12 MRS. BENTRAM: And then I don't know why we
13 got back on.

14 DR. BENTRAM: Yeah.

15 MR. TURRELL: Do you recall if the boat had,
16 the boat was rocking and do you recall anyone moving in
17 the boat?

18 DR. BENTRAM: I don't.

19 MR. TURRELL: Prior to the --

20 MRS. BENTRAM: There was like an assistant.

21 DR. BENTRAM: Mate.

22 MRS. BENTRAM: And he was standing, he was
23 usually up front and then he moved towards the back,
24 and then he was kind of near us, when he told everybody
25 on the opposite side of us, everybody move to the side,

1 right before the wave hit. And when he said that, the
2 waves hit right away and then we were all thrown to the
3 other side. So, it flipped almost immediately.

4 MR. TURRELL: When the mate instructed the
5 people on the starboard side to move, can you estimate
6 how many people moved?

7 MRS. BENTRAM: It seemed like, I wasn't
8 really, it seemed like everybody rushed -- But,
9 immediately, I don't know if they ever made it all the
10 way over, because we were, as soon as, it seemed as
11 soon as they got up to, we just went over.

12 MR. TURRELL: Okay. And do you recall under
13 water, I know it is difficult to even imagine
14 remembering something in the water, but, do you
15 remember the canopy being in tact under water?

16 DR. BENTRAM: My initial survey after I
17 gathered myself, being thrown on the other side, the
18 canopy was in tact. My daughter was dangling from it,
19 from one of the seats, she said she was, so the boat
20 was at that point had gone over 90 degrees.

21 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

22 DR. BENTRAM: It hadn't done a full 180. And
23 then that is when I looked up and saw the glass shadow
24 and, and a hand pulled me out of there.

25 MR. TURRELL: Okay. So, when the boat started

1 rolling over, did it stop at any point or was it a
2 continuation --

3 DR. BENTRAM: It seemed like it had at mid
4 point.

5 MR. TURRELL: How long did it take for the
6 boat to rollover?

7 DR. BENTRAM: I --

8 MR. TURRELL: Did you hear any radio
9 communications around the boat?

10 DR. BENTRAM: I didn't.

11 MRS. BENTRAM: Before we had, before it
12 actually slipped and it seemed like he was talking to
13 somebody, try to go back, someone was saying.

14 MR. TURRELL: What time was that?

15 MRS. BENTRAM: It was starting to get really
16 bad, I mean, it had gotten really bad very quickly. It
17 seemed like a minute before -- I just remember he
18 was, he came, he was making his turn.

19 DR. BENTRAM: He was making his turn.

20 MR. TURRELL: That 360 turn.

21 MRS. BENTRAM: And I guess he thought, I felt,
22 I wasn't really watching, I was watching the kids. It
23 did seem like he had no control over the boat. It
24 seemed like overall -- it just seemed like we were in a
25 whirlpool, but, you were watching that.

1 DR. BENTRAM: That was when I was --

2 MRS. BENTRAM: But, I --

3 MR. TURRELL: Okay. I will go to Commander
4 Hammond from the Coast Guard.

5 LIEUTENANT COMMANDER HAMMOND: You said you
6 were watching the captain, did you see them make any
7 steerings or corrections?

8 DR. BENTRAM: Yes. Yeah, that is when we were
9 moving in a circular pattern.

10 LIEUTENANT COMMANDER HAMMOND: So, he was
11 turning the boat, the boat on purpose.

12 DR. BENTRAM: Yes.

13 LIEUTENANT COMMANDER HAMMOND: And that was to
14 the left.

15 DR. BENTRAM: It was to the right front, I
16 guess, it was like it was to the right.

17 MRS. BENTRAM: Yes, I would say --

18 DR. BENTRAM: Because he did a broadside and
19 we kind of survived that and come back into the full
20 360 degree from the left side, where the wind was
21 coming right out of the Inner Harbor. We were facing
22 forward.

23 LIEUTENANT COMMANDER HAMMOND: You mentioned
24 just before you were getting on the boat, you could
25 look up in the sky and definitely see a distinct

1 difference in the sky, that there was weather coming
2 through. How long from the time you saw that until the
3 time you folks were actually in the bad weather?

4 DR. BENTRAM: Five and a half minutes, six
5 minutes.

6 MRS. BENTRAM: It started raining as we left.
7 As soon as we pulled out.

8 DR. BENTRAM: He is asking when did I see it.

9 MRS. BENTRAM: Oh.

10 DR. BENTRAM: The squall line.

11 MRS. BENTRAM: Oh, when we got in the boat --
12 the captain told us, so -- because they were with us on
13 the other boat. I remember his camera because I have a
14 camera similar, a similar tripod.

15 LIEUTENANT COMMANDER HAMMOND: Okay. How
16 significant was the weather when you were on the boat
17 before you started backing up, or did it hit after you
18 had pulled away?

19 DR. BENTRAM: Well, with the enclosure there,
20 and all the windows were closed, so, and we were facing
21 towards the dock, not where the weather was coming
22 from. So, and we were, so, I don't really know what
23 the weather was doing at that point.

24 LIEUTENANT COMMANDER HAMMOND: But, it was
25 windy and raining at that point before you pulled away

1 from the pier?

2 MRS. BENTRAM: It had just started to rain. I
3 remember like a few minutes, like two seconds after we
4 pulled out, it started to rain.

5 LIEUTENANT COMMANDER HAMMOND: Okay. So it was
6 very soon after pulling out.

7 MRS. BENTRAM: Yes.

8 LIEUTENANT COMMANDER HAMMOND: Did you see any
9 lighting?

10 MRS. BENTRAM: Yes, I saw lighting shortly
11 after we departed. I said, oh, we are not suppose to
12 be out here in the lighting. And I remember reading
13 that on one of the post, that we didn't operate during
14 a lighting storm. And it was, I guess it was over
15 towards where we were going. So, but we were already
16 out there, but I didn't see any lighting before we
17 left. It was after, we were already on the water when
18 the first lighting appeared.

19 LIEUTENANT COMMANDER HAMMOND: Do you remember
20 being given any type of a safety brief prior to pulling
21 away from the pier?

22 DR. BENTRAM: On the initial boarding, back at
23 the Inner Harbor, we got a safety briefing, where the
24 life jackets were. A standard speech. But, not when
25 we departed Fort McHenry.

1 LIEUTENANT COMMANDER HAMMOND: The boat that
2 you were on, if I remember from the Inner Harbor, that
3 was a different boat from the one you were on?

4 DR. BENTRAM: Correct.

5 LIEUTENANT COMMANDER HAMMOND: Okay. When you
6 got on the --

7 DR. BENTRAM: We got on nine, I think because
8 that is where Katy's coat was.

9 MRS. BENTRAM: We got on, on we got on three
10 on the --

11 DR. BENTRAM: Three boat --

12 MRS. BENTRAM: At the Waterfront Hotel, we
13 picked up one and then it took us to the Inner Harbor.
14 And then that, we got on a different one, I know we
15 went to Fells Point and transferred to the little boat
16 with the other captain.

17 LIEUTENANT COMMANDER HAMMOND: Okay.

18 MRS. BENTRAM: And on the way from Inner Boat
19 to Fells Point, we realized Katy was, didn't have her
20 coat. And they were trying to get her coat -- I forgot
21 what the question was.

22 LIEUTENANT COMMANDER HAMMOND: Do you know
23 when you switched boats to go from Fells Point to Fort
24 McHenry, was there a safety briefing given on that
25 boat?

1 MRS. BENTRAM: Oh -- I don't recall either
2 way. I remember clearly the one at Inner Harbor. And
3 that might have been because, I was, a lot of --

4 LIEUTENANT COMMANDER HAMMOND: Which way was
5 the captain facing when he was driving the boat?

6 DR. BENTRAM: He was facing, it looked like to
7 the left, yeah, near the back, to the right side of the
8 boat.

9 LIEUTENANT COMMANDER HAMMOND: Okay.

10 DR. BENTRAM: Because I didn't -- because he
11 was on the right side of the boat, yeah.

12 LIEUTENANT COMMANDER HAMMOND: Was he, did he
13 have his seat turned facing the left, so he was sitting
14 sideways.

15 DR. BENTRAM: Yes.

16 LIEUTENANT COMMANDER HAMMOND: Can you
17 remember any orders given prior to the vessel flipping?
18 Any orders given to put your life jackets on or
19 anything like that?

20 DR. BENTRAM: There was a comment made about
21 life jackets.

22 MRS. BENTRAM: I didn't hear, I didn't --

23 DR. BENTRAM: And they kind of chuckled. You
24 know, the --

25 LIEUTENANT COMMANDER HAMMOND: I have got just

1 one more. The general visibility once you were in the
2 middle of the storm, how far do you estimate you could
3 see?

4 DR. BENTRAM: At the top or --

5 LIEUTENANT COMMANDER HAMMOND: Just around
6 you, other landmarks around you.

7 DR. BENTRAM: Oh, I think I could see
8 landmarks within 100, 200, 300 yards.

9 LIEUTENANT COMMANDER HAMMOND: Okay.

10 DR. BENTRAM: Docks and that sort of thing. I
11 know we were being driven towards another dock by the
12 harbor dock area. So I think it was fair, but not
13 great, and it wasn't fogged in or anything like that.

14 LIEUTENANT COMMANDER HAMMOND: Okay. Fine. I
15 have no further questions.

16 MR. TURRELL: Okay. Andy?

17 MR. MURRAY: I --

18 MR. TURRELL: Okay. Mariette?

19 MS. BURER: You have taken a couple of
20 different, you transferred from different boats, three
21 total.

22 MRS. BENTRAM: Yes.

23 MS. BURER: Would you describe the condition
24 of the last boat as far as what it looked like, how big
25 it was?

1 DR. BENTRAM: I thought it was the smallest of
2 all the boats.

3 MS. BURER: Okay.

4 DR. BENTRAM: And I had mentioned that it
5 seemed a little unsteady -- And also, I remember the
6 front door stuck a lot, it needed some WD-40 or
7 something like that. The first mate went out several
8 times -- dealing with the rope, he would coil it --

9 MS. BURER: Okay. Can you tell me a little bit
10 about the demeanor of the mate and the captain, did the
11 captain, did he greet you at all when boarding or the
12 mate or any kind of facial acknowledgment?

13 MRS. BENTRAM: I think --

14 DR. BENTRAM: I had a conversation with him
15 about the -- He seemed professional. And the first
16 mate was older --

17 MS. BURER: Okay.

18 DR. BENTRAM: The captain and the first mate
19 were --

20 MS. BURER: Okay. Do you recall if other
21 people were trying to get onboard at all, at a later
22 time or was there any kind of head count performed?

23 MRS. BENTRAM: They were, people who wanted to
24 get on the boat, but they had to wait, there were two
25 more, two guys, I think and they were put on, but they

1 were with a friend. And I remember him calling on the
2 radio, I guess, there was a man on, at the gate, at
3 Fort McHenry and I think he radioed back that they
4 could take two more.

5 MS. BURER: Okay. All right.

6 MRS. BENTRAM: Twenty seven or 24.

7 MS. BURER: Do you remember how he was able to
8 figure that they were able to take two more passengers?

9 MRS. BENTRAM: It looked like he was, the
10 first, is that the first mate, he looked like he was
11 looking around. And gave --

12 MS. BURER: Okay. I don't have any more
13 questions.

14 MR. TURRELL: Okay. Just a few more.

15 You mentioned the tripod is something that
16 you recognized. Can you describe that to me? What --

17 MRS. BENTRAM: We have a college student
18 living with us, and he lent me the exact same tripod,
19 because I had a digital camera and Canon camera and I
20 noticed this gentleman because of the camera was the
21 Canon camera like mine and a tripod. It was a very
22 nice tripod. And --

23 MR. TURRELL: Is it full size tripod?

24 MRS. BENTRAM: Yes, it closes to about this
25 and then it has something that comes, comes out and

1 kind of, you use the camera around it and it opens up
2 on the -- but, it was, you know, he had on the back of
3 his backpack, tied to his backpack and his camera over
4 his shoulder.

5 MR. TURRELL: Can you estimate how heavy that
6 tripod would be?

7 MRS. BENTRAM: It was about --

8 MR. TURRELL: Do you recall what it is made
9 of?

10 MRS. BENTRAM: I -- It was very similar to the
11 one I have.

12 MR. TURRELL: Okay. Was the boat the same
13 boat, the one when you left from Fells Point to the
14 Fort, was it the same boat as the one you returned, the
15 accident occurred?

16 MRS. BENTRAM: The same captain, I am not, you
17 know --

18 MR. TURRELL: So, it was the same captain.

19 MRS. BENTRAM: And the same mate.

20 MR. TURRELL: Same mate, okay.

21 MRS. BENTRAM: I believe. I don't recall if
22 it was the same boat, it was the same --

23 DR. BENTRAM: Can you repeat that question?

24 MR. TURRELL: Sure. The boat that you took
25 from Fells Point to the Fort, was it the same boat that

1 you returned --

2 DR. BENTRAM: I believe so. I am not sure if
3 they brought anything back, but they were the same
4 place we got off.

5 MR. TURRELL: Okay. And do either of you have
6 any boating background, experience or scuba diving or
7 anything?

8 MRS. BENTRAM: No.

9 MR. TURRELL: And, can you just recall where
10 the life jackets were stored?

11 MRS. BENTRAM: Under the --

12 DR. BENTRAM: Under the top, there was
13 somewhere --

14 MR. TURRELL: Okay. I have nothing further.
15 Anyone else have any questions?

16 We are going to end the interview now. And
17 if you would just acknowledge this has been recorded
18 for accuracy.

19 MRS. BENTRAM: What --

20 MR. TURRELL: Just acknowledge it was
21 recorded.

22 MRS. BENTRAM: Yes, yes.

23 DR. BENTRAM: Yes.

24 MR. TURRELL: Okay. Thank you.

25 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)